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Marion McCollum

Rosie the Riveter
World War II Home Front Oral History Project

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Interview conducted by
Samuel J. Redman
in 2010

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Marion McCollum

Table of Contents—Marion McCollum

Interview 1: December 1, 2010

[Audio File 1]

Race—Employment and work—Other types or work or employment—Everyday life—
Rationing—Religion—Methodist—Leisure and entertainment—Post-war life—
Employment—Housing—The Great Depression/Dust Bowl—Observations of parents at
work and home—Wartime patriotism (excitement, energy)—Reactions to Pearl Harbor—
Urban Geography—Wartime migration—Coming to California—Urban growth in
Oakland—Transportation—Economy—Home ownership—Korean War

[Audio File 2]

Urban growth in Oakland and Richmond—Postwar job market competition—Leisure and
entertainment in Oakland and San Francisco—Childhood and religion—Korean War—
Moving around Oakland—Daughter at Holy Name University—Impact of Highway 13
on Oakland

Interview 1: December 1, 2010

Begin Audiofile 1

Redman: All right. My name is Sam Redman, and I'm here today on December 1, 2010. I'd just like to begin by asking you to tell me your full name.

1-00:00:22

McCollum: Okay. Marion Carol McCollum.

Redman: Great, and the spelling of the last name?

1-00:00:26

McCollum: M c C O L L U M.

Redman: Great, thank you. Where were you born?

1-00:00:39

McCollum: Poughkeepsie, New York.

Redman: Poughkeepsie, New York, okay. Whereabouts is that?

1-00:00:46

McCollum: Its eighty miles from New York City, six miles from President Roosevelt's estate on the Hudson River.

Redman: Great, and what were your parents like?

1-00:01:05

McCollum: What were they like?

Redman: Yeah.

1-00:01:03

McCollum: Well, my mother was a saint.

Redman: Okay.

1-00:01:07

McCollum: She was a wonderful woman. My father was a RCA salesman, and during the Depression, of course, he lost his job. Things were kind of rough there for a long time, and—

Redman: Go ahead. Do you remember old you were when your father lost his job? Do you have memories of that?

1-00:01:40

McCollum: I think I might have been about twelve maybe?

Redman: So you recall that time in your parents' life.

1-00:01:47

McCollum: I do.

Redman: Okay, and did that force them to leave the area, or did they stay there?

1-00:01:54

McCollum: No, no, they stayed in the area.

Redman: Okay, and what then did your father do for work? Was he unemployed for a while during the Depression?

1-00:02:00

McCollum: He as unemployed for a while.

Redman: Looking for work, and—

1-00:02:04

McCollum: Looking for work, and he did whatever he could.

Redman: Okay, and you were in school at the time?

1-00:02:17

McCollum: Yeah, I was in, I think I was going to junior high. Out here it would be called junior high, be about the seventh or eighth grade.

Redman: Okay, and do you remember, did you have favorite subjects in school? Did you like going to school?

1-00:02:35

McCollum: Oh, yeah. I loved it.

Redman: Okay, and what sorts of memories do you have from those years in school?

1-00:02:43

McCollum: Oh, I was a cheerleader.

Redman: Okay.

1-00:02:50

McCollum: And attended all the football games and parades and joined a small sorority and had a lot of girlfriends.

Redman: So you were pretty active in school.

1-00:03:03

McCollum: Oh, yeah.

Redman: Okay, and did you have sort of an idea of what other families were experiencing during the Depression? Was it a lot like your father?

1-00:03:12

McCollum: Yes, I remember I might have been younger than that when kids would come to call for me to go to school. We all went together, and my mother would ask them if they had breakfast, and a lot of times they didn't. So my mother would feed them.

Redman: Oh, wow. Okay, and did she stay at home, or did she find work, too, during the Depression?

1-00:03:47

McCollum: She was a wonderful seamstress, and so she made various things and sold them.

Redman: Okay, so she would make some clothes and sell them, okay. Now, do you have any other particularly strong memories from high school?

1-00:04:09

McCollum: Strong memories. [Thinking]

Redman: Or favorite memories?

1-00:04:15

McCollum: Well, I remember bringing my history books home to do my homework and everything, and my dad would always grab the book ahead of me, and he said he would give it to me later.

Redman: Oh, so he would want to read it.

1-00:04:37

McCollum: Yeah, he wanted to read it.

Redman: Okay, now how much schooling had he had?

1-00:04:43

McCollum: I don't think he had high school. I think he went up to maybe sophomore in high school.

Redman: Okay, so maybe that reflected some of his desire to—

1-00:04:56

McCollum: He loved history.

Redman: Okay, that is really interesting. Okay, so did you attend college?

1-00:05:05

McCollum: Only two years.

Redman: Two years, okay. Whereabouts did you do college those two years?

1-00:05:10

McCollum: Back East.

Redman: Okay, in New York?

1-00:05:12

McCollum: Yeah.

Redman: Okay, and do you remember about what years those—

1-00:05:26

McCollum: Probably '41 maybe.

Redman: Okay, and do you remember what you—

1-00:05:30

McCollum: And then I came out here, and I went to Heald's College.

Redman: Okay, and what prompted you to come out all the way to California?

1-00:05:42

McCollum: Because I married a native Californian.

Redman: Okay, and what was his name?

1-00:05:45

McCollum: John Carroll.

Redman: Okay, and how did you two meet?

1-00:05:48

McCollum: Actually, it was a holiday, I think it was Easter. I was with all my girlfriends, and he was with all the sailors that were at Annapolis. They were going through training, and my husband was a deep sea diver in training at that time. So I think I was going to Quantico to school. Anyway, his group of friends and my group of friends all met in Lafayette Park. That's where we met each other. We were just having a lot of fun, and I was sitting on one of the picnic tables. I took my shoe off, and my intended, well, let's see, John, he took my shoe and ran away with it and said that he wouldn't give it back to me until I gave him my telephone number. So all my girlfriends were saying, "Marian, don't you dare give him your telephone number." He was so cute, he was tall and handsome. He was so cute. He had a wonderful personality. So finally he persuaded me to give him my telephone number.

Redman: That is a cute story.

1-00:07:48

McCollum: Yes.

Redman: Can I just check the tape here? Great, okay, so you finally gave this young man your number, and that's how you started—

1-00:08:07

McCollum: That's how we started.

Redman: Okay, that's great.

1-00:08:09

McCollum: And, oh, I better tell you this part. Our first date we went to the movies, and I saw him looking at me and I said to him, "Why don't you watch the movie?" He said, "I'd rather look at you." Then he said, "I'm going to marry you." I started laughing. Then I thought, "What's going on here?"

Redman: On the first date, that's amazing.

1-00:08:42

McCollum: On the first date he said he was going to marry me.

Redman: But he called it just right, apparently, huh?

1-00:08:48

McCollum: Yeah, he did.

Redman: So then you came out to California with him.

1-00:08:53

McCollum: No.

Redman: No?

1-00:08:54

McCollum: No, I was working for the FBI.

Redman: All right. So you had been hired by the FBI about what time?

1-00:09:03

McCollum: The end of '41.

Redman: The end of 1941. Okay, so would be about the time of Pearl Harbor.

1-00:09:12

McCollum: Wait, wait, no, no, end of '42.

Redman: So let's step back then for a minute and let's talk about Pearl Harbor. Do you recall the events of that day?

1-00:09:25

McCollum: Oh, yes. I remember everything about Pearl Harbor. Yes. I had a boyfriend, and he was at my house for dinner. We had the radio on. I remember it so

well. We heard President Roosevelt come over and tell us we were at war, that the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor.

Redman: So that's a pretty strong memory that you have.

1-00:10:01

McCollum: Yes, and my boyfriend said, "I've got to enlist right away."

Redman: And is that what he did?

1-00:10:09

McCollum: He did, yeah.

Redman: Okay. Whereabouts was your family living at that time? Were you still in New York?

1-00:10:17

McCollum: Yeah, we were still in Poughkeepsie, New York.

Redman: So did a lot of your friends from high school, a lot of them were enlisting or getting wartime work?

1-00:10:27

McCollum: Oh, yes. A neighbor of mine, he was a little bit ahead of me in high school, he enlisted right away, and he died at the Solomon Islands,

Redman: So pretty early on in the war?

1-00:10:45

McCollum: Pretty early on.

Redman: So then you finished high school and attended some college before joining the FBI, is that correct?

1-00:10:56

McCollum: Right.

Redman: Now can you tell me a little bit about finding a job at the FBI, what that was—

1-00:11:03

McCollum: I didn't find it.

Redman: It found you?

1-00:11:06

McCollum: It found me.

Redman: Okay.

1-00:11:10

McCollum: I was already working for a jeweler, and, oh, I belonged to the YWCA. We [the YWCA] had a meeting and a little talk by one of the FBI men, so as we were all departing ready to leave, he tapped me on the shoulder. He said, "Could I talk to you?" And I said, "Yes." He said, "How would you like to join the FBI?" And I said, "Oh, no." I said, "I already have a job." He kept on and on telling how nice it would be and everything. And I said, "Well, if I joined, could my girlfriend come with me?" And he said, "Which one is your girlfriend?" I told him, and he said, "Yes." So anyway, that was that and one my friends that I had babysat for, she called my mother and she said, "What kind of trouble is Marion in?" And my mother said, "Why?" And she said, "Well, the FBI was here interviewing me about Marion. My mother said, "I hope you said all nice things." She said, "I certainly did."

Redman: So they did pretty extensive background checks.

1-00:12:56

McCollum: Oh, yeah. They interviewed to see if my parents had any jail time, and all that kind of thing to make sure they only got decent people in the FBI.

Redman: And what did your parents think about the possibility of you working with the FBI?

1-00:13:20

McCollum: I think they thought it was great.

Redman: Okay. Did they see it as part of the war effort?

1-00:13:25

McCollum: Yes.

Redman: Okay, and how about yourself? Did you think of this as part of the war effort?

1-00:13:35

McCollum: I can't recall if I did or not. When you're young, you're not thinking about all those things.

Redman: Okay, so you thought of it maybe more of an exciting opportunity.

1-00:13:46

McCollum: An adventure.

Redman: An adventure, okay. So you moved down to Washington, D.C., then, is that correct?

1-00:13:54

McCollum: Well, my girlfriend and I, we moved down to Washington, D.C. We didn't know where we were going to live or anything, and then we contacted the FBI. Then they said you have to have a house mother. So one of the FBI

ladies had a brother that worked for the FBI, he was an agent. And so she said go over and see if she has any rooms there. So we went over, and anyway, at that time you didn't see many people with red hair, and she was tall, angular, and she had this bright red hair, and we didn't know what was going on. Anyway, she was wonderful lady and actually she gave me my wedding reception. There were four people there working for the FBI.

Redman: Were they all young women?

1-00:15:14

McCollum: No.

Redman: Okay.

1-00:15:17

McCollum: One was Mr. Bacon, and he was middle aged man, and the other one, can't think of her last name, she was a middle aged lady, and two young girls, and they were our age.

Redman: So did the FBI tell you that it was a requirement to have a house mother because you were young women or—

1-00:15:36

McCollum: Well, if you went to an apartment, you had to be in at a certain time, not go beyond a certain street, I think it was Ninth Street, like if you were going down Broadway in the old days, you didn't go beyond Twelfth Street in Oakland. Now it's all changed.

Redman: So the FBI, they didn't want you to go out drinking and carousing—

1-00:16:14

McCollum: Oh, no, no no.

Redman: Okay, so tell me about then, I'll get back to your work at the FBI because that seems like it would be very interesting. Then what was social life like for you during that time? Was it a pretty—?

1-00:16:31

McCollum: Fine. [laughs]

Redman: Okay, so the FBI maybe didn't want you to have, but you had a good time nonetheless.

1-00:16:35

McCollum: Oh, we went to USO dances, and we had a lot of fun.

Redman: Okay, so they just didn't want you to go to certain parts of town.

1-00:16:42

McCollum: Oh, yes, that's right. And no drinking or smoking or anything.

Redman: Okay, so but you still managed to have a very good time despite those restrictions.

1-00:16:54

McCollum: Oh, yeah.

Redman: Tell me about what the USO dances were like, while we're on that subject.

1-00:16:58

McCollum: Oh, they were wonderful. There were lots of young men, soldiers, sailors, and they were all from different parts of country and out of the country, too, English, and just a lot of fun.

Redman: Now, I've heard and I've read some places that soldiers and sailors that were coming through Washington, D.C. had access to a number of different things including like they could go to the Smithsonian and spend some time there. So a number of troops were coming through that period so they'd have USO dances and maybe be able to go to the movies and things like that so you were able to spend some time with the troops as well as the other girls from the FBI?

1-00:17:52

McCollum: Oh, yeah.

Redman: Okay, so tell me a little bit about your work at the FBI.

1-00:17:58

McCollum: Well, when I first went in, let's see, they sent us to Quantico, Virginia for training, and - let's see what did I do when I first came in? They kind of put you at various jobs to see where you fit in, and I went to the fingerprint identification, and then where'd I go, I went to the duplicating room where they, this is going back a long time. Then I took dictation with the Dictaphone. I didn't like any of that, so my last job was in the reading room. I liked that. We had what you call jackets, it's a file of the criminals and all the people that came under FBI scrutiny, and some of them were thick like this. I had to go over them all and do various things with them. I was the last one of the people that was in the reading room. We were the last people that handled the jackets, they were called jackets.

Redman: So let's step back to fingerprinting, let's start with that.

1-00:19:51

McCollum: Yeah, I liked that.

Redman: You did like that, so it's the dictation that you hated.

1-00:19:57

McCollum: I didn't want to be typing and taking dictation and sitting. I liked to move around.

Redman: Okay. So tell me about what the fingerprinting was like. What do you remember from—?

1-00:20:12

McCollum: I don't remember a lot. They taught us about all the swirls and things and no fingerprint is alike and everything, and we had to examine them all. I don't remember a lot about it any more.

Redman: Okay, and then the dictation was too much sitting and typing didn't interest you.

1-00:20:34

McCollum: Yeah, I didn't like that.

Redman: So about how long did you work in the reading room? Was that the majority of your time?

1-00:20:43

McCollum: I don't remember.

Redman: Okay, now tell me about these jackets, these files. So these files had been put together by other people.

1-00:20:56

McCollum: Different things had been done to them.

Redman: Okay.

1-00:20:59

McCollum: Before we handled them.

Redman: So people would add to the file in the FBI, and then eventually they'd make their way to the reading room.

1-00:21:10

McCollum: Um hm.

Redman: Would agents who maybe were assigned someone would come in and then they could read up on these?

1-00:21:15

McCollum: Yeah.

Redman: Okay, so was your job to sort of coordinate these jackets, or you were reading them—

1-00:21:21

McCollum: I can't remember all we did to them, but we had to go over them all.

Redman: Okay, now was it interesting to read some of these files?

1-00:21:32

McCollum: Oh, yes, yes. Some of them were movie stars, and whoo hoo.

Redman: Interesting. So in some sense it was kind of, did it feel like you were reading gossip almost about—

1-00:21:48

McCollum: Yeah. I remember this one especially because her name was, she was a black lady, and her name was Minnie Pumpkinseed, and I thought that was so funny.

Redman: Just a wonderful name.

1-00:22:07

McCollum: Yeah. [laughs]

Redman: Okay, so now you would read these files, and some of them were almost to the point of silly, and some of them were interesting, but were some of them really dangerous criminals?

1-00:22:25

McCollum: Oh, yes.

Redman: Okay. Maybe the majority of them were pretty dangerous criminals or—

1-00:22:29

McCollum: Oh, they were in there for all different reasons.

Redman: Okay, did it strike you at all that it was unusual that the FBI was tracking some of these movie stars, or did it seem to make sense to you at the time.

1-00:22:48

McCollum: No, they had done various things.

Redman: So it didn't seem overly paranoid at any, it seemed to make sense based on the—

1-00:22:56

McCollum: Yeah.

Redman: Okay, so tell me about what your day to day life was like go work in Washington. You would start out with your girlfriend in the House in the morning.

1-00:23:10

McCollum: The four of us.

Redman: The four of you together.

1-00:23:15
McCollum: Yes, together.

Redman: And did you all work pretty—

1-00:23:16
McCollum: All separately.

Redman: Oh, really, okay, so—

1-00:23:19
McCollum: And we worked in the armory.

Redman: Tell me about what that was like.

1-00:23:25
McCollum: Well, it was a great big older building. Now in Washington, D.C. they have a brand new building that's got everything, state of the art.

Redman: So you would commute to work everyday. Did you guys walk or take the train or—?

1-00:23:44
McCollum: We had to take three buses.

Redman: Wow, okay.

1-00:23:50
McCollum: Yeah.

Redman: Okay, and then—

1-00:23:54
McCollum: And then they had a cafeteria there where we could eat.

Redman: So would you get together with your girlfriends again everyday for lunch, or—?

1-00:24:03
McCollum: Various people that we worked with.

Redman: Okay, so sometimes maybe other people from the reading room or—?

1-00:24:09
McCollum: I wouldn't say with my friends, no.

Redman: Okay, and then would you go back from work everyday at the same time with your girlfriends?

1-00:24:15
McCollum: Yes.

Redman: Okay, and then at night you'd maybe go out to a USO dance or to a movie?

1-00:24:24

McCollum: Um hm.

Redman: Okay. Are there any other particular memories from a day to day life what that was like going to work everyday and—?

1-00:24:30

McCollum: Oh, it was fun.

Redman: Okay, why was it fun? What did you enjoy about it?

1-00:24:34

McCollum: I don't know. I had a lot of boyfriends, and they would take me to the bases where they were stationed and have dinner there, and it was interesting. Then we'd go roller skating and bowling. We did a lot of things.

Redman: So at the time when you were, maybe not when you were taking dictation, but when you were doing fingerprinting and in the reading room, you found the work to be interesting, and you were living in this new place and meeting all of these new people, so it was a pretty exciting time in your life. Is that right?

1-00:25:21

McCollum: Oh, yes.

Redman: Okay, so other women have the same type of jobs, the girls that you were working with?

1-00:25:33

McCollum: Oh, they all had different jobs, one of them worked for the Special Agent.

Redman: And what was that like? What sorts of things would they do for the Special Agent?

1-00:25:44

McCollum: Oh, I don't know. Secretarial jobs, writing letters and stuff like that.

Redman: Is there stuff that, were there things that you weren't allowed to talk about with the other girls?

1-00:25:54

McCollum: Oh, we didn't talk about any of that.

Redman: Interesting. So was that hard for you, or was that something that you got used to pretty quickly?

1-00:26:03

McCollum: I never talked about anything, maybe something like Minnie Pumpkinseed I would tell the girls, something innocuous.

Redman: But the more serious—

1-00:26:18

McCollum: Stuff, yeah, you kept that to yourself.

Redman: Interesting. And was that easy to get used to, or was that hard?

1-00:26:25

McCollum: No. It was easy.

Redman: Okay, all right, so I've read in some places that Washington, D.C. transformed from a pretty sleepy Southern town to a more modernized city at this time, that a lot of people were moving in, there were a lot of new government jobs with the war going on, and so there were sort of increased levels of bureaucracy and a lot of new people being hired to do a lot of new things in these government agencies. Did you find that to be the case? Did you find that you were part of a new wave of people coming into the city?

1-00:27:00

McCollum: No. But I will tell you this. There were a lot of Southern girls there, and they treated the black people differently. I'm from the East, and we didn't discriminate at all. I mean, there were a few blacks in our high school, and they were on the football team and we all thought they were great and everything. Well, it was hard to get used to coming to Washington, D.C. and seeing the discrimination. In fact, I was with a couple of girls from the FBI, and we got on the bus and it was crowded, and there were black people sitting in the seats, and they told these black people to get up and give us a seat and go to the back. They used a few swear words, too. I couldn't believe that, and I remember saying to the man that they were talking to, I said, "Please sit where you want. I'm young. I can stand." The man said, "No, I've got to go in the back." I couldn't believe it.

Redman: So moving from the North and the East, that was a pretty big surprise.

1-00:28:39

McCollum: It was.

Redman: Okay, and would you say that was maybe the hardest thing to get used to—?

1-00:28:45

McCollum: Yeah, that was pretty hard. I didn't like it.

Redman: Okay, and did you feel like the city itself was pretty segregated, that certain parts of the city—?

1-00:28:56

McCollum: Yeah, certain parts you weren't allowed to go into, but I don't think it was because of, it was just more drugs, maybe, or something like that.

Redman: So it was maybe more dangerous?

1-00:29:14

McCollum: Yeah, more dangerous.

Redman: That was the perception? Interesting. So you mentioned over the phone that you'd met J. Edgar Hoover.

1-00:29:24

McCollum: Oh, yeah. He came through one day, and I got to shake his hand.

Redman: Okay, whereabouts was that? Was that when you were fingerprinting or dictating or in the reading room, do you recall that?

1-00:29:33

McCollum: I can't remember, no. He just passed through.

Redman: Okay, and what do you remember about that experience?

1-00:29:44

McCollum: I thought it was great.

Redman: He had been head of the FBI for quite some time.

1-00:29:52

McCollum: Oh, yes, yeah. We thought he was a great man.

Redman: So people in the FBI liked J. Edgar Hoover. That was your perception?

1-00:29:59

McCollum: Oh, yeah.

Redman: Okay, and did it sort of feel like you were meeting a celebrity?

1-00:30:06

McCollum: Yeah.

Redman: Okay, so do you remember rationing in Washington, D.C. at that time?

1-00:30:16

McCollum: Oh, yes. We had to give our ration tickets or coupons or whatever they were to our house mother.

Redman: Okay, so you would give those to the house mother, and then the house mother would buy supplies and groceries for the house, okay. At least you didn't have to go grocery shopping or anything like that, right?

1-00:30:45

McCollum: No, we didn't have to do anything like that.

Redman: Okay.

1-00:30:53

McCollum: I remember she belonged to the Mormon religion, and she would tell us, "Now when you see the brothers coming, hide my cigarettes. Hide the tea, hide the coffee," and we'd take it upstairs.

Redman: So she wasn't allowed to smoke or have caffeine, but she would—

1-00:31:11

McCollum: She did.[laughs]

Redman: Okay, so that must have been a pretty funny experience.

1-00:31:15

McCollum: Yeah, that was funny.

Redman: So how long during the end of the war, did you stay in Washington, D.C.? How long did you work at the FBI?

1-00:31:29

McCollum: Only about a little over two years I think because when I married my husband he didn't want me there.

Redman: Okay, so tell me about that, you married your husband, and he wanted to come out to California.

1-00:31:48

McCollum: No, no, no. He was a deep sea diver. He graduated from deep sea diving school.

Redman: Okay.

1-00:31:54

McCollum: And we got married in May of '44, and we got an apartment and he was still going to school, and I'm trying to think, oh, somebody found us a nice apartment.

Redman: Where was that apartment, do you remember?

1-00:32:20

McCollum: I can't remember the street or anything.

Redman: But it was in D.C.

1-00:32:27

McCollum: In D.C., and we were there from let me see, May, June, July, probably about September, and he was ordered to come back. Then they sent him, he was in the Navy for almost five years.

Redman: So he stayed in the Navy after—

1-00:32:59

McCollum: No, he didn't. Just from '41 or '45.

Redman: Okay, so then towards the end of the war, did it—?

1-00:33:08

McCollum: He had so many points, they came home on points. He was married, he'd been overseas on tour duty, deep sea diver and all that added up to all the points, and so they told him, "You are free to go home on any transport that you can find." And he couldn't find any, until finally there was a barge going south. This is from Honolulu.

Redman: Okay.

1-00:33:50

McCollum: He got on the barge, and it was the slowest moving thing on the water, of course, so he got out to California. He thought I'd be waiting here, but I was waiting for him to get back, and my mom, she didn't want me to go on an airplane at that time. And, of course, all my life I wanted to be a pilot on an airplane. So I succumbed to her wishes and I got on a train.

Redman: From D.C. to California.

1-00:34:38

McCollum: Yeah, and that was an old, old train, oh my goodness. I think it had a fire, I've forgotten what you call them, where you feed the fire into to keep it warm, I can't remember. And on that train were nothing but soldiers and sailors and the whole train, that's all that was on the train. I think it took us five days to get here.

Redman: So you probably had a lot of interesting people to talk to the whole way.

1-00:35:20

McCollum: It was a lot of fun.

Redman: Okay, so tell me, first let me step back and ask, I do want to talk about the end of the war and sort of how people felt about that. So let me ask in particular about Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Do you remember the bombings?

1-00:35:37

McCollum: Oh, yeah. Oh, we were devastated. We realized that the bomb had to be done because the Japanese Emperor, he would not give in. We told him what was going to happen, and they still wouldn't give in until I think we hit Nagasaki first, and then they realized, they surrendered.

Redman: Do you feel like you had a special feeling about that because of—

1-00:36:21

McCollum: Oh, I thought it was horrible, we saw the picture of that little girl running and all her clothes were coming off, and oh, it was horrible.

Redman: So tell me about at the end of the war then you were maybe reading about some of the sad news, but were you also happy that the end of the war was—

1-00:36:52

McCollum: Oh, sure. Oh, yes.

Redman: And then having your husband be able to come back to the states?

1-00:36:55

McCollum: Oh, yes.

Redman: Okay. Now did you have any sort of feeling of sadness in leaving the FBI at the end of the war? Or were you happy to—?

1-00:37:02

McCollum: No, I was just happy to have my husband home and alive.

Redman: Okay, so you were ready to move to California?

1-00:37:17

McCollum: Yeah, to get on with our lives.

Redman: Okay, so you felt like working at the FBI in some sense was a temporary adventure?

1-00:37:28

McCollum: Yes.

Redman: Okay, so it wasn't particularly hard for you to—

1-00:37:34

McCollum: But I was sorry afterwards that I hadn't transferred out here. I didn't actually realize that I could do it.

Redman: Interesting. Okay, so some people with the FBI had jobs out here, and you'd sort of wished that you had done that?

1-00:37:57

McCollum: Well, yes. But, of course, I was young. I wanted to start a family, so it wouldn't have worked anyway.

Redman: Okay, so tell me about then arriving in California after this long train ride. What was that like?

1-00:38:17

McCollum: Well, that was an interesting trip to say the least. My husband was one of four boys, and all of them were in the service, and so all of them were coming home.

Redman: Oh, wow, and they all made it through.

1-00:38:43

McCollum: Yeah. Well, Chris, my husband, had the most dangerous, because he had to dive in the Philippines down in all that mud, and he lost his ring that his mother had given him, a diamond and a sapphire ring, and what else did he lose? I think he lost two rings. When you get down in the water and your hands get slim and the rings fall off.

Redman: So arriving back in California was an interesting experience?

1-00:39:30

McCollum: Oh, yes, it was.

Redman: Okay, and your husband then had been discharged from the Navy, and what then did he find for work? He wanted to stay in California?

1-00:39:41

McCollum: Yes, he went to work for a place as a teenager that he had worked for Westinghouse, and they hired him immediately.

Redman: Okay.

1-00:40:00

McCollum: So there were, let's see, Paul was at his mother's. We were at his mother's and I said to my husband, "I've got to find an apartment." So I went to the Tribune and put in, "Young couple non-smoking, non-drinking," and I put the ad in the paper, let's see. Oh, first I was trying to find an apartment and looking in the classified section and every time I phoned up, the apartment had already been taken.

Redman: Oh, wow.

1-00:40:52

McCollum: Finally, I told my mother-in-law I said, "I'm going down and put my own ad in, so I put my own ad in, "Young couple, non-smoking, non-drinking, will take excellent care of your property." And I got calls, and so I finally found an apartment and it was across the street from Mosswood Park. At that time it was really lovely. The landlord lived in the building, it was a fourplex. So we had an apartment. So then I said, "Oh, I've got to find a job." So, let's see, I went to the bank, a central bank on Broadway, and when I got in the reception room there were loads of people in there and so finally one of the officers of the bank came out and he said, "I'm sorry." He said, "I've taken all your applications but there isn't any jobs right now." So everybody started filing

out, and I started filing out, and he tapped me on the shoulder and he said, "Come on with me." So I got a job there in the bookkeeping department. I worked there for a while, until I got pregnant, and then I had to quit.

Redman: Okay.

1-00:42:44

McCollum: And then we found a house.

Redman: Do you feel that your experience at the FBI helped you—

1-00:42:50

McCollum: No.

Redman: No, okay so—

1-00:42:49

McCollum: I don't think so.

Redman: It was a pretty different world working at the bank after the war.

1-00:42:54

McCollum: Yeah.

Redman: And what did you do at the bank?

1-00:43:00

McCollum: Took care of the books.

Redman: Okay, so do you think that going to apply for jobs and putting on your application that you worked for the FBI that people—

1-00:43:16

McCollum: I don't know if I did that or not.

Redman: Okay. It seems to me like people would look at that and say, "Wow, that's an interesting job history to have." Okay. So I do want to ask, I did miss one question, I know you were young and healthy and your housemates must have been young and healthy, too, but do you remember anything about healthcare during the war years, visiting the doctor?

1-00:43:47

McCollum: Oh, yes. I remember this. Anyway, I met this policeman; this is before I was married.

Redman: This is in D.C.

1-00:44:01

McCollum: Yeah.

Redman: Okay.

1-00:44:02

McCollum: So we went out on a date and then he told me he said, "Would you like to go for a ride on my motorcycle?" Oh, I said, "Sure." But I didn't realize that it's steel, and in those days we didn't wear pants, we wore dresses, and so my skin touched the steel when we were riding and I got a burn on the inside of my leg there, and I remember going to the doctors, I think it was under FBI, and they took care of it. But I don't remember anything else about going to the doctors, but it took a while for that burn on my legs to heal.

Redman: It must have been a pretty dramatic experience for going on a date. You end up with a—

1-00:45:09

McCollum: I had a lot of [interesting] experience[s].

Redman: Okay, so do you have any other, let me just, we'll finish up with D.C. here before I come back to California. Do you have any other thoughts on how Washington, D.C. was changing or what sort of your experiences were in Washington, D.C. at that time?

1-00:45:39

McCollum: Well, we were doing out job and having a social life and, of course, we were concerned about all the young men going to war because that's all the people we met were in some form of service, and every time we heard something disturbing about the war we were devastated because a lot of the girls had husbands that were in the war and boyfriends that were over there, and we were concerned about them.

Redman: Now I've read at some times that museums would have exhibits, like the Smithsonian might have an exhibit on war photographs, but they might also have an exhibit on something completely unrelated to the war so people could go and sort of get away from the sort of constant news about the war. Or they could sort of go and see the, they could read the news, they could do something like that, and I sort of think of going to movies would be an experience where you could escape, but they would also have newsreels.

1-00:47:08

McCollum: They had a lot of war movies, too.

Redman: Yeah, okay, so did you feel like it was kind of overwhelming like the war sort of surrounded you at all times, or did you sort of get used to it and you wanted that information about your friends that were abroad?

1-00:47:21

McCollum: Oh, yes. It's hard to remember going back so many years, but we had concern about everything. Everything was rationed. You couldn't find any good shoes or clothing or anything like that.

Redman: So you were concerned in sort of this broader political sense about the world and how it was changing and all this stuff going on abroad, but also from day to day life just getting a pair of shoes was a challenge.

1-00:48:03

McCollum: It was.

Redman: Okay. Do you remember any other rationing in particular that was challenging to live with or might even an annoyance, shoes, you mentioned as an example?

1-00:48:16

McCollum: Oh, yeah. You couldn't find good shoes, no leather, anything like that.

Redman: Okay, and I know rubber and milk and some meats were rationed. Did you miss that at all? Did you miss food items or anything?

1-00:48:31

McCollum: No, I don't think I missed, I don't think I even thought about it really.

Redman: Okay, okay, so now let's jump back forward back to California, if that's all right, and tell me a little bit about that first house that you had.

1-00:48:48

McCollum: Oh, yes. I had saved up \$3,500 from my husband's pay. He got good pay because he was a deep sea diver. He didn't have to do anything, and they fed him steaks and anything he wanted. So anyway, from his pay I saved up \$3,500, and when I came out here I wanted to buy a house right away. So he talked to his stepfather, and his stepfather said, "Why don't you wait, Jack, because houses will come down." So my husband told me, "My stepfather said houses are going to come down," and I laughed I said, "With all these servicemen all looking for a place to live, houses are going to come down?" Well, he said, "Maybe we ought to wait a while." So in the meantime I had my first daughter, and I said, "Let's look for a house." I think she was about a year and a half, and I found this house on a hill, and, mind you, we didn't have a car. We put in to buy a car, but they put us on a list.

Redman: So there weren't cars to be had?

1-00:50:30

McCollum: No cars to be had, and finally we found a used car. He brought it home, and the next morning he went to start it, and it wouldn't start.

Redman: Oh, boy, okay.

1-00:50:43

McCollum: So we had to take that one back, and so anyway, we bought this house. It cost \$11,500. If we had bought it when I first wanted to buy a house, we could have bought one for \$5,000.

Redman: Wow, so housing prices were skyrocketing.

1-00:51:04

McCollum: You see how they start going up. So anyway that was \$11,500, and it was called Crest Avenue. We had no car, and my poor husband had to walk all the way down the hill and all the way up the hill, and the nice part about shopping was that at that time bread men would come to your house, laundry people would come to your house, pick up your laundry, milkmen would come, and there was a Wellman's Food, a big truck, would come with all kinds of canned things and produce men would come with vegetables.

Redman: That must have been nice to have those services.

1-00:51:58

McCollum: It was wonderful. You got really good service. There was a store about let me think about six blocks downhill, but of course, then you had to carry your groceries uphill.

Redman: So it was easier to have things delivered than—

1-00:52:17

McCollum: Oh, it was fun and it was great.

Redman: Okay, that's great.

1-00:52:25

McCollum: So finally my husband said, "This can't go on. I can't keep climbing that hill." So we sold the house and we bought another house down the hill and let's see, that was about two blocks from the grocery store. At that time he found I think it was a Chevrolet, about a 1930 Chevrolet.

Redman: So pretty old.

1-00:53:02

McCollum: Oh, yeah, but it was in great condition, and I think he paid \$350 for it, and when we sold it we got the same amount. So we had a car.

Redman: Finally.

1-00:53:19

McCollum: Finally.

Redman: Okay.

1-00:53:23

McCollum: Yeah, and let's see.

Redman: Tell you what, I'm going to change the tape, and we'll take a quick break.

Interview 1: December 1, 2010

Begin Audiofile 2

Redman: All right. So we were talking about how Oakland was changing right after the war, and we were talking a little bit about, I mentioned the Kaiser shipyards, which had been such a big, booming industry and in Richmond and in Oakland there were a lot of people coming in for work during the war, and then after the war you'd mentioned all these servicemen were coming to town and trying to find houses and jobs and—

2-00:00:36

McCollum: Jobs and homes, mostly.

Redman: Homes were the big draw, okay.

2-00:00:41

McCollum: They were living with their parents or rooms with other servicemen, and it was hard.

Redman: So, and you'd mentioned, too, that following when you went to find your own job at the bank that the room was just chock full of—

2-00:01:05

McCollum: Yeah, applicants.

Redman: Okay, so do you think a lot of people maybe were trying to find work in a similar situation as you as maybe their husbands had just recently come out of the service?

2-00:01:16

McCollum: Oh, yes, I think so.

Redman: So what other sorts of memories do you have of Oakland during that time?

2-00:01:30

McCollum: Well, in Oakland you could go to the movies at night, I know I went alone. There was an Orpheum, they had vaudeville acts there, it was wonderful. Going to the movies at that time I would walk home alone.

Redman: So it was pretty safe.

2-00:01:52

McCollum: Yeah, well, it was getting unsafe, but at that time I didn't know the difference because I didn't live in Oakland, see?

Redman: Okay.

2-00:02:04

McCollum: But my husband said no more of that walking home like that.

Redman: It was getting a bit too dangerous.

2-00:02:12

McCollum: Yeah.

Redman: So did you two spend any time in San Francisco before your child was born and then—?

2-00:02:18

McCollum: Oh, yes.

Redman: Okay, and what did you do in San Francisco?

2-00:02:20

McCollum: Oh, we went over to see all the highlights over there. The Girl in the Fishbowl, I think, was outside, I can't quite remember. [Probably a reference to Bimbo's 365 Club, which featured an act called The Girl in the Fishbowl].

Redman: Now what was that? The girl in the fishbowl?

2-00:02:38

McCollum: It was like a night club.

Redman: Oh, wow, okay.

2-00:02:39

McCollum: Yeah, and then we went to Finocchio's.

Redman: Okay.

2-00:02:45

McCollum: That's where the men dress up as women.

Redman: Okay.

2-00:02:50

McCollum: And then we went to Mona's and all the good steak houses, all the things that we read about, we'd go over there, yeah.

Redman: So you'd be able to, you'd hear about some of these places and—

2-00:03:07

McCollum: Well, my husband knew of them.

Redman: Okay. Did you sort of feel like here after some of these lean years growing up in the Depression, and your husband had been far away, and you'd worked really hard, so now you had a little time to celebrate and go over and have a steak every once in a while, was that sort of a fun time?

2-00:03:31

McCollum: Oh, yeah. It was fun, yeah. I think when you're young you don't think of all the hardships that you go through. Of course, mine are minor compared to some people.

Redman: Okay, so you didn't reflect on your childhood as much as—

2-00:03:56

McCollum: No, because my mother was a very religious woman and went to church all the time, I sang in the choir, and after church we would go to various homes and my mother would put on a sort of a buffet. Then some of her friends would come, and my mother played the organ. We had one of those old organs where you pull out the stops, and, we had two of them. Anyway, my mother would play the organ, and her friends would sing some of the hymns.

Redman: What denomination were you?

2-00:04:50

McCollum: Methodist.

Redman: Methodist, okay.

2-00:04:55

McCollum: Then they would tell us kids, "Okay, now, go on out and play. The adults want to have a little talk." Then we'd sneak back to see what they were talking about. [laughs]

Redman: So sometimes maybe it would be interesting.

2-00:05:14

McCollum: It wasn't anything.

Redman: But, yeah, that's funny, okay. Well, so then I'll just ask sort of to close, if you have any sort of additional thoughts about growing up or working at the FBI or moving to California, any sort of reflections or thoughts on that time in your life?

2-00:05:48

McCollum: No, I was just so happy to have my husband back home and to start living again without the war and everything. But then the Korean War came.

Redman: Okay.

2-00:06:04

McCollum: So a lot of the servicemen had to go back in.

Redman: How about your husband, did he—?

2-00:06:11

McCollum: No, we were having a baby, and he'd already had a lot of time in, so he didn't have to go, but I know some of our friends, their husbands had to go. Fortunately, they came back. But I think more men were killed in the Korean War than in World War II. I'm not sure about that, but I think so.

Redman: So a lot of—

2-00:06:50

McCollum: Now I'm very political. I listen to everything.

Redman: So how many children did you have?

2-00:07:00

McCollum: Two.

Redman: Two, okay.

2-00:07:00

McCollum: Two girls.

Redman: And you were at home during their childhood.

2-00:07:04

McCollum: Yeah.

Redman: Okay, so you'd mentioned a lot of your friends and your husband's friends re-enlisted during the Korean War.

2-00:07:18

McCollum: No, they didn't re-enlist. They had to go back in.

Redman: Okay. Now tell me about, let me ask one more kind of question about Oakland and they gave out political issues in the 50s and 60s and then on into the 70s, Oakland changed quite a bit.

2-00:07:47

McCollum: Oh, they did.

Redman: Between the anti-war movements and the Black Panther movement.

2-00:07:55

McCollum: Oh, I remember all that, yeah.

Redman: There was a lot going on in Oakland, so did you move again?

2-00:08:03

McCollum: Oh, yes. Then we moved, all three houses were in the same vicinity. We moved across Mountain Boulevard to Dixon Court. They had built these houses I think just before the war. Our house at that time was about eight

years old, and there were four courts, and there were eleven houses on our court, so the kids really had a good life because I didn't have to worry except when the men came home, where the trucks came down the street to deliver the purchases. So the kids kind of played right around in the court, rode their bikes and little cars and things right in the middle of the road.

Redman: So that was a pretty good time to have a family in Oakland.

2-00:09:13

McCollum: Yeah, that was a good time, yeah.

Redman: Okay, excellent.

2-00:09:19

McCollum: Then my husband could see that Oakland was changing, and when they put Highway 13 in, he said it's time to move.

Redman: Okay, so that was sort of the tipping point.

2-00:09:37

McCollum: So then we—

Redman: Do you remember about when that was?

2-00:09:42

McCollum: Yes, that was 1962 I think. They started building 13. Before that it was a dirt road, and my daughter went to Holy Names College and I remember I used to go up, she worked at the Elmwood Theater in Berkeley, you know where that is?

Redman: Yes, I do.

2-00:10:11

McCollum: Yeah, she was a teenager. I think she was sixteen or fifteen. First she started as an usher, and then she became a cashier, and this was just a little side jobs for her while she was going to school and in college, too. I used to have to go up, she didn't have a car, and I'd go up to the college, pick her up, and try and get her back before curfew, which was 11:00 o'clock.

Redman: Okay.

2-00:10:49

McCollum: And there were no men in the dormitory, only when they had open house. She lived at Holy Names for four years.

Redman: Okay.

2-00:11:05

McCollum: Yeah.

Redman: Okay, well, I think with that, that's a pretty good place to close. Is there anything else you'd like to add, sort of your recollections of that we've talked about today?

2-00:11:17

McCollum: Well, the freeway went in, and it changed a lot of things, housing and everything.

Redman: And it was time to move.

2-00:11:29

McCollum: Yeah, and then we had this house built and moved here in 1963.

Redman: Well, this is just a gorgeous home.

2-00:11:36

McCollum: Oh, it isn't.

Redman: Oh, no, this is a lovely place. Thank you for having me .today.

[End of Interview]